



Newsletter July 2026

The great beauty of St George's Cathedral

"Everything in St George's Cathedral should by its great beauty cause all who enter to feel something of the eternal Beauty of God."

These words were spoken by Archbishop Geoffrey Hare Clayton who died on 7 March 1957 immediately after signing a letter to Prime Minister J.G. Strijdom, forcefully opposing a Bill calling for the segregation of churches on racial grounds. The Bill was never made law, and Anglican churches never allowed racial segregation.

The "great beauty" referred to by Clayton is found in the cathedral's magnificent gothic architecture, music, treasures and exquisite stained glass. A project has been initiated to record the artefacts and glass in words and photographs in a publication which can be accessed by the current congregation and visitors, and also record the material for posterity.

A few words about the Stained Glass may spark your interest.

The most noteworthy glass includes that of Gabriel Loire and his son Jacques who used the relatively new slab glass or dalle de verre in, amongst others, the Creation Windows and the Great West Window. A memorial to Lord Louis Mountbatten, the central panel shows Christ stilling the storm. The left hand St George and the right hand St Michael panels are both memorials to Dean Ted King. The intensity of the dalle de verre is highlighted in a south transept window in orange shades rather than the usual blue. The Loire Studio in Chartres still provides glass all over the world, from Berlin to Rio de Janeiro to Hakone, Japan.

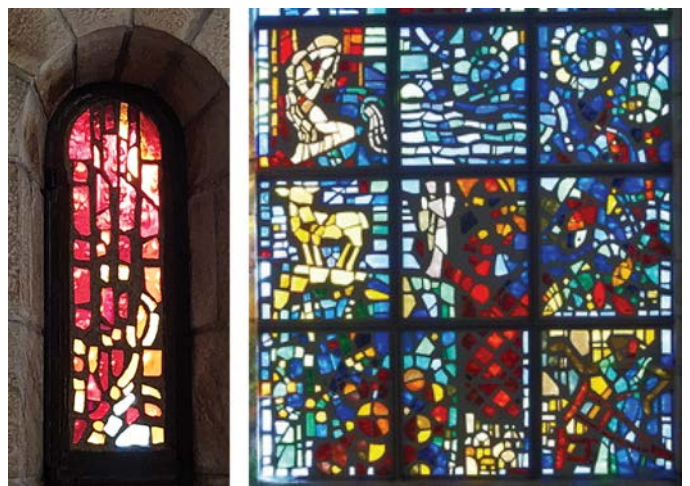
While father-and-son Loires were active here between 1972 and 2001, an earlier English artist, Francis Spear, installed fourteen windows between 1956 and 1966. Spear's faces have an intensity accentuated by the use of black, particularly around the eyes. He regarded the

Rose Window as his finest work and he was bitterly disappointed when Loire was chosen to fill the empty space in the west end on the theme Christ in Glory.

The windows by Mayer of Munich (1871) at the back of the Link were taken from the old cathedral and are in their position only temporarily. It is of concern that the wood supporting them is showing signs of aging and should receive attention very soon. After these, the next oldest is the glass in St John's Chapel (1909), all by Kempe & Co. after Walter Tower had taken over the firm. The pale, meditative lights are in contrast to the vivid colours of Spear, Loire and Mayer. One of the four Church Fathers is of St Augustine of Hippo (now Annaba in Algeria), characterised by a heart burning for wisdom. We see him holding a heart on fire.

The cathedral has a wealth of detail on the unique representations of Christian life, history and beliefs. Six talks and/or tours will be presented in July at 10h00 on Mondays and Thursdays to widen and deepen the knowledge of all, congregation and visitors alike.

Judith Gordon (Cathedral Historica)



Left: The South Transept Window
Right: The Great West Window

John Ramsdale: actor and servant of the Church

23 May 1937 – 14 June 2026

At the 2026 AGM of the Friends of St George's John Ramsdale, gave a fascinating account of his association and work with three Anglican archbishops. A few weeks ago I sat with him in the Starke Ayres restaurant to hear more of his life story.

His problem when thinking about our meeting, John said, was not what to put in but what to leave out. He compared his life to the two sides of a coin with the church on one side, and the theatre on the other: the church in its rituals and ceremonies is 'theatrical'; the theatre is 'religious' in that it tells of human endeavor. John's life has repeatedly crossed over between the two.

He came into drama through the church. In 1944 his family moved to Salt River and enrolled him in St Luke's Church. Four years later the rector of St Luke's, Frank Barker, met and married a young, talented and vivacious English woman. Jocelyn started a theatre company at St Luke's. John Ramsdale, aged thirteen, played her son in an English comedy.

There have been great moments. When he was fourteen Dame Sybil Thorndyke, 'the queen of the British theatre' visited Cape Town. Dame Sybil asked why all the actors she met were white, and she was told that the theatre was 'the preserve of the whites'. Someone who overheard this remark phoned the rector at St Luke's who arranged for her to meet the theatre group from his congregation. John was one of them.

When he started work possibilities were limited by job reservation, but one option was in printing. His career in printing was interrupted when Leslie French who had come from London to direct the annual Shakespeare play at Maynardville asked him to audition for the role of Lancelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice*. A few months later the bill prohibiting the mixing of races on the South African stage was signed into law. John's response was to join the South African Arts Union, a group of actors, musicians and writers whose aim was to break down, as far as they could, segregation in the arts. "One didn't realise how much time and effort the whole apartheid thing took," he said.

In the 1970s John had left Salt River and was living in Bree Street where he shared a house with actor Bill Curry and journalist Denis Hatfield. Bill and Denis were members of the congregation at St George's Cathedral. Attracted by the beauty of the building and the dignity of the worship, John sometimes accompanied Bill and Denis to services. One Good Friday Dean Ted King asked him to take part in a dramatized reading of a play called *The Davidson Affair* to replace the traditional three-hour service. Church

and drama joined hands again. Over the years he participated actively in the life of the Cathedral.

He assisted Pat Ellis in the Cathedral Book and Bric-a-brac shop, spending many hours at the annual book fair at Cavendish. From a spell as sacristan he knew all the sets of vestments and occasions on which they had been worn. For years he was a valued member of the committee of the Friends of St George's. One of his last contributions was to prepare a proposal for council on setting aside a room for a Cathedral archive.

John's recent talk to the Friends was entitled 'Three Archbishops I have known'. During his time at Cowley House, Zonnebloem College and Church House, where the Diocesan office is located, John had worked with eight archbishops. Among his stories is that of Archbishop Geoffrey Clayton who refused to obey the apartheid government's legislation on segregation in churches; a marble tile in the chancel in the Cathedral marks the place where Clayton's ashes are interred. A more flamboyant character was Archbishop Joost de Blank. He came from Holland and was known for the parties he hosted at Bishops court as well as his vigorous criticism of the apartheid regime. In 1960 de Blank consecrated the first black African bishop, Alpheus Zulu. Robert Selby Taylor, in his quiet way a formidable presence, was the first Archbishop of Cape Town to break with the tradition of the English Church and be consecrated on African soil. He also advocated the full participation of women in the Church.

John was not afraid of dying, he told me; he had had a full life, a wonderful life. In the last months his health deteriorated.

He died at the Robin Trust Home on Sunday 14th June at 9 35 as the procession was entering the Cathedral for the morning Eucharist. His passing leaves us saddened but grateful for his gifts, his story-telling, his extraordinary memory and his wonderful sense of humour. Go in peace, John.

Mary Bock



Message from the Dean

News of John Ramsdale's death reached us during the cathedral's Sunday Eucharist service. The text message I received was that John had died at around 9h35 - about the time we were processing in on our introit hymn. It was 'The Old Hundredth' - a metrical version of Psalm 100 - 'All People that on Earth do Dwell'.

I shall hold dear the thought that John died while we were singing that much loved hymn and particularly the stanza which says:

*O enter then his gates with praise,
approach with joy his courts unto;
praise, laud and magnify his name always,
for it is seemly so to do.*

I imagined him, not so much striding, but rather riding through those gates on his beloved motorbike and wearing his black leather jacket! At the 'Friends' meeting in April it was clear that John was not his usual, bubbly, vivacious and gregarious self. His near-on 89 years had started

to show, he had shrunk somewhat and he looked tired. His beautifully prepared and impeccably presented talks on 'The Three Archbishops' - Clayton, de Blank and Taylor - held us spellbound even though it was sandwiched between the AGM and Evensong!

I first met John when I was just starting high school. He was a regular visitor at the Rectory in Grassy Park where Rowan Smith was the priest. Soon we found ourselves acting alongside each other in a play about the Book of Common Prayer - he played King Edward VI! Latterly he attended St Michael and All Angels but remained committed to the Friends and his love for the cathedral.

A bright light has been extinguished and a beautiful voice silenced. A soul which shone with such radiance and joy has entered into that place prepared for those who love God and a place which stood empty at the table of grace has now been occupied. Thank you for the laughs and the memories. Rest in Peace John.

Annual General Meeting 2026

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends on Sunday 19 April 2026 was well attended in spite of the inclement weather.

Dean Terry opened the meeting. Winston Adams (chair) welcomed new members: Rodney Abrahams, Wayne Alexander, Saskia Emary, Warren Jacobs, Jeff and Sonia Lawrence, Wendy Adams and Derrick Petersen, Zandiswa Makiwene, Nina van der Velde, Willem and Rhoda van Schalkwyk, Heather Dyers, and David Wainford representing his mother Frances,

Apologies were received from Judith Gordon, Alicia and Carryn James, Anna Page and Naomi van Rooyen and Abe and Esme Williams. Mary Frost was unable to attend because of ill-health. The meeting conveyed best wishes for her recovery.

Projects: Mary van Blerk reminded the meeting of our undertaking to erect a plaque commemorating the visit to the Cathedral of President Mandela for the first Human Rights Day celebration on 21 March 1995. Mary Bock spoke of the need to repair the hymn books used at Evensong. David Wainford, head sidesman, was asked to check which books need repairs.

Bequests: Jonathan Mort, our legal adviser, informed the meeting of two bequests, from the

estates respectively of Pat Ellis and Margaret Selberg, the latter to be used to promote the experience of music in the Cathedral. Once these bequests are finalized a committee will be set up to consider how best to use them.

Garden of Remembrance: the Dean spoke to this. There is a need to create a space where ashes can be deposited and the deceased are commemorated. The idea was approved at the Cathedral Vestry Meeting: the planning of the garden of remembrance and the future use of the Columbarium are being considered.

Election of Committee 2026-2027: present members, Avril Salo, Winston Adams, Mary Bock, Sharon Temmers, Gary Petersen, John Ramsdale, will continue to serve. Newly elected committee members are Wayne Alexander, Walter Mercuur, and Saskia Emary who has agreed to take the role of Hon. Treasurer in place of Diana Kraak. Diana and Nikki Lomba were thanked for their services to the Committee.

Speaker John Ramsdale's presentation entitled 'Three Archbishops I have known', was much enjoyed.

The meeting concluded with a bring-and-share tea.

Winston Adams

New Committee Members

Saskia Emary:

Saskia was born and bred in Sasolberg. She moved to Cape Town when she married a Capetonian, and her first child was born here. With her second marriage she inherited a 'host of step-children'. She runs her own business, 'Uncanny Foods', distributing perishable food to restaurants and corporates.

For nearly twenty years she was a member of Christ Church Constantia, where she served as parish councilor, treasurer and church warden. She moved to St George's Cathedral hoping for a sabbatical. Then Dean Terry asked her if she would take on the post of treasurer of the Friends of St George's. Not one to waste time Saskia has already made a spreadsheet of the names and addresses of Friends to record the paid-up members.

She loves the Cathedral space, she says, and is keen to learn more of its history. Welcome to the Friends, Saskia!

Walter Mercuur

Walter was born and grew up in Athlone; he attended Primary School at Zonnebloem and Athlone High School. His connection with Zonnebloem has continued and he is now on the Board of the Childrens' Art Centre.

He has been in education all his professional life, as teacher, lecturer and education planner. After his 'first retirement', he was invited to serve on the Anglican Board of Education for Southern Africa where he primarily visited government schools built on Anglican property. He was responsible for schools in the Western Cape which were located in the Diocese of Cape Town, Saldanha Bay, False Bay and George. His area of responsibility was to strengthen the link between the school, the priest of the parish in which it is located and the bishop.

His journey to St George's Cathedral began from Athlone, where he attended St Mark's church but came with his parents to the Cathedral on festival days; he married and moved to

Blackheath where he attended the Church of the Holy Nativity. Later he moved to Belhar and experienced a spell in a Pentecostal Church.

When he came back to the Anglicans about 14 years ago he joined the Cathedral. He has enjoyed his introduction to the Friends' Committee. We look forward to our continuing association.

Wayne Alexander

Wayne Alexander was born and grew up in Silvertown on the Cape Flats in the Western Cape. He is currently the Chief Director of the Regional Land Claims Commission in the Western Cape and Free State, employed by the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development.

The focus of his work is ensuring the restoration of dignity and humanity through Land Restitution to people who were dispossessed of land because of racially discriminatory laws. A project close to his heart is the restoration of District Six in Cape Town, where funding is required to rebuild homes.

His journey to St George's Cathedral from his home parish of St George's, Silvertown – under the spiritual leadership and guidance of Fr David Profit - began when he visited in the time of Dean Ted King to witness the preaching of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. He joined the congregation when Colin Jones was Dean.

He and Carol were married by the sub-dean Chris Ahrends and their children baptized at St George's Cathedral.

Asked what he would like to see the Friends achieve, he introduced the idea of 'Young Friends of the Cathedral': recruiting young people to understand that 'it's not so much about 'coming to church' as what the church can offer you and what you can bring to the church. He expressed his willingness to help create such an intergenerational dialogue.

We welcome you to the Committee of the Friends, Wayne.

The objectives of the Friends of St George's :

- To help preserve and beautify the Cathedral and its treasures;
- Maintain links between past and present members of the Cathedral and well-wishers worldwide;
- Welcome visitors and support the Cathedral's ministry of hospitality.

Donations and subscriptions

The Friends of St George's Cathedral
Nedbank account no: 108 332 6627

How to become a Friend:

Please apply to the Hon Secretary at: friends.st-georgect@gmail.com or speak to one of the committee.

May we urgently remind members who have not yet paid their 2026 subscription to please do so.
Due subs can be paid to: The Friends of St George's Cathedral, Nedbank account no: 108 332 6627

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